

The Parliamentary Library of Montenegro: Coming out from the Past

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a short historical overview of Montenegrin parliamentarism and activities in connection with the Library of the Parliament of Montenegro since its establishment in 1953. An emphasis is placed on the need to bring this library up-to-date and to turn it into a modern parliamentary library. The status of the library within its parent organization, the Parliament of Montenegro, is analyzed, as well as the library collections (acquisition policy and organization), user profile, use and nonuse of sources and services, and staffing. Finally, the inevitability of structural changes in the Library of the Parliament of Montenegro's activity is discussed along with its goal to step into the twenty-first century.

INTRODUCTION: PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARIES TODAY

In any country, parliamentary libraries are special libraries of high importance. The reason any special library exists is to serve the institution to which it belongs. In the case of the parliamentary library, its clientele is well defined. The main mission of the parliamentary library is to provide current and complete information in response to requests from members of parliament (MPs)—that is, those who decide on issues of national importance—thus saving them the time they would have had to invest in finding answers themselves. Parliamentary libraries also provide services to employees of the parliament, including secretaries of parliamentary committees and administrative staff.

Parliamentary library collections have to reflect the needs of this specialized clientele. They consist of publications and documents such as legal statutes, official decisions, and case law of the state and the parliament, as well as publications from parliaments and institutions in other

countries whose legal practice could help the work of deputies, committees, and the administrators service. Publications whose contents are connected with legislature, law, political sciences, economy, European Union documents, international legal practice, and with social sciences are also part of a parliamentary library collection. Depending on their capabilities, parliamentary libraries are responsible for compiling analyses based on deputies' and parliamentary committees' requests. There are parliamentary libraries that do not have very large holdings, but the collections they have are thoroughly selected and well organized. Good selection of materials enables parliamentary librarians to disseminate information faster and to ensure a more efficient usage of holdings. Periodical weeding of unused and obsolete materials is also performed in order to maintain the currency of collections.

Special librarianship, particularly parliamentary librarianship, is characterized by the prioritizing of informatics over traditional librarianship. The use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) is of crucial importance for the operations of modern parliamentary libraries, because nowadays it is unthinkable that any European parliamentary library's work is based on the traditional organization of information departments and services. The parliamentary library has to be useful to and to be used by deputies and the administrative staff so that their work can be more efficient and professional.

Good infrastructure, modern equipment, educated information experts, well-selected holdings, effective interlibrary cooperation, information organized according to international standards—these are just some of the prerequisites of efficient parliamentary work. Without using the new information and communication technologies and well-organized information services, parliamentary libraries would have remained, effectively, small museums of printed books. It is no longer necessary to emphasize the importance of timeliness and accuracy of information in legislative work. Nowadays parliamentary libraries should not be static, they are expected to be actively engaged in the process of retrieval and dissemination of information, and they should offer information and research services in addition to traditional services (Ilić, 2002). Special libraries, especially parliamentary libraries, should be thriving information institutions, and they should lead the way in the application of the most recent information and communication technologies in the library profession.

THE PARLIAMENT OF MONTENEGRO

Montenegro is situated on the Adriatic Coast in southeast Europe. Its neighboring countries are Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania, and Italy (sea border). The size of Montenegro is 13,812 km², the length of its borders is 614 km and its population is 658,000, consisting,

among others, of Montenegrins, Serbs, Bosnians, Albanians, Croats, and Muslims (it was under Tito that the tradition of designating Muslims as an ethnic, as opposed to a religious, group began). The country's capital is Podgorica, with a population of 179,000 inhabitants.

The Parliament of Montenegro is a unicameral legislative body of eighty-one members who are elected by direct general elections. In the past, the general conventions of Montenegrins, or councils of clan chiefs, represented a kind of national assembly, which in one way or another has operated since the seventeenth century. Montenegro was declared an independent principality for the first time in 1878, at the Congress of Berlin. The first parliamentary elections were held in 1906, and the first parliamentary session was held on October 31, 1906. This date is celebrated as the official beginning of the parliamentary life in Montenegro. Montenegro's one hundred year parliamentary history consists of various stages: its emergence as an independent country (1906–18); the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (1918–29); the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–41); the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1945–63); the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as one of the six republics with its own individual parliament (1963–91); the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (1991–2003); and the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (2003–6). Montenegro was again recognized as an independent state on May 21, 2006. The current Parliament was elected in March 2009. MPs have a four-year-long mandate. The annual parliamentary budget is approximately 4.5 million Euros.

THE LIBRARY OF THE PARLIAMENT OF MONTENEGRO: AN OVERVIEW

The Parliamentary Library was established in 1953, within the Administrative Service of the Parliament. The official record that could confirm its constitution does not exist. We make this statement based on a fact that the first record in the accession's register of the Parliamentary Library dates from 1953. However, the library was closed from 2000 to 2007. The Montenegrin parliamentary authorities decided to have all the books and materials moved from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building (close to the Parliament) to the newly remodeled space in the basement of the Parliament where the library is now officially situated. The space is equipped with appropriate furniture, bookcases, and computers with Internet access. The library has functioned close to the parent organization (in a neighboring building), and its employees have been part of parliamentary administration staff. The library is open to all those employed in the state administration. As a unit with limited financial resources, the Library of the Parliament of Montenegro cannot perform significant original researches and analyses. This is an integrated service, where both research support and reference services are provided. In the process of transition

to a post-socialist Montenegro many special libraries were closed (Milunovic, 2005). Although the Parliamentary Library of Montenegro was closed for seven years, it continued its work behind closed doors because there existed a general awareness of the importance of the services the library provided to the Parliament. Unfortunately, nowadays this awareness is fading as many Montenegrin deputies no longer feel the need to use the library and its services. It is hoped that such attitudes toward the library (indeed toward librarianship as a professional service), as an institution created to support the daily activity of deputies, will change as the library increasingly modernizes its services.

The library holdings (about 2,500 bibliographic items) consist mostly of the following:

- The old book stock of about 1,500 titles, acquired after the World War II and during the Communist period until the end of the single-party system in 1992
- The collection of *Phonographic Records*, from 1946 to present, amounting to 348 volumes
- The collection of the federal *Official Gazette*, comprising ninety-three volumes (or one to three per year) from 1945 to 2000 (including the former Yugoslav republics of Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija, Socialistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija, and Savezna Republika Jugoslavija)
- The collection of the Montenegrin Republic *Official Gazette*, from 1945 to 2007, amounting to eighty-two volumes (2008 is not yet bound)
- Over five hundred new titles acquired during the last year
- The collection of old photographs
- The Montenegrin legislation online database

The library is rarely used by deputies or other staff. They call the library only when they need information about some explicit law or a paragraph of that law, or about the date when it was officially adopted or published. Librarians are asked to copy articles, usually from the *Official Gazette*, for Parliament's supporting staff. The *Phonographic Records* are in high demand, primarily when MPs are preparing for various sessions. Books are shelved according to the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) system. Other materials such as the *Official Gazette* and the *Phonographic Records* are arranged according to an accession number. The library carries subscriptions to all three titles of the daily Montenegrin newspapers. They are kept for half a year and after that they are discarded for lack of space. The space limitation will require more electronic publications, both books and periodicals. The main negative aspect related to the library's holdings is the fact that there are no specialized periodical titles and no books in the English language (except for the gifts received from foreign delegations).

Clayton and Gorman (2003, p. 2160) remind us that: "Intensive usage means 'good holdings,' and every book is important to the library as much as it is used." In this connection, the fact that deputies do not use the collections of the library (except for the *Official Gazette* and the *Phonographic Records* because of their interests in recent legislation and the most recent parliamentary session) is an indication of the fact that the existing collection and the organization of the library's services are out of date. The low use of the library has led us to the conclusion that its departments and services require urgent reorganization. It needs to come out from the past; it needs to reinvent itself.

Regarding the book processing cycle, systematic and subject cataloging were not practiced until 2008. Today librarians use the online cataloging system, which became possible by the library's joining the COBISS system (Cooperative Online Bibliographic System and Services, <http://www.cobiss.net>) in November 2008. There are the special entries for the *Phonographic Records*.

Cooperation with other European parliaments is ongoing and will bring about significant changes in the Montenegrin Parliament Library. The ultimate goal is to transform the library into a useful resource for MPs and staff so that it can add efficiency and professionalism to their daily work.

Staffing is another major block on the library's performance. According to the *Rulebook of the Organization Chart and Departments in the Parliamentary Service of the Parliament of Montenegro* (2008), the Bureau for Research and Library was established to consist of two units: the Parliamentary Library and the Research Centre. The library and the center were supposed to have ten employees in total, including the position of bureau head, but this plan has remained on paper only. Two of the ten positions are supposed to be occupied by librarians (senior/head and a junior/assistant librarians) but only two people have been hired so far in the entire bureau.

STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF THE PARLIAMENT OF MONTENEGRO: THE OSCE MISSION PROJECT, APRIL 2007–MARCH 2011

Under a four-year project (2007–11) aimed at strengthening the capacity of the Montenegrin Parliament (funded by the government of Austria and supported by the German Foreign Ministry), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission to Montenegro (<http://www.osce.org/montenegro>) at the beginning of 2007 hired a professional librarian to provide technical assistance to the library. The project also provided training on research methods and techniques and supplied more than five hundred new books and publications.

The main task was to assist staff in their efforts to reorganize and transform the library. The consultant worked on the organization of the

librarians' hands-on professional training and their continuing professional education. The long- and short-term stages of this development have been completed. The next step will be the evaluation and weeding of the existing collection. After that, the next phase will be designing of an acquisition plan to purchase publications, professional journals, and databases to bring the collection up-to-date. This was the first collection development plan for over a decade.

A subscription to the EBSCO online database in cooperation with the University Library of Montenegro is forthcoming. A specialized package, *Legal Collection*, is of particular interest, as well as other online resources the university library subscribes to for its special libraries including the Law Faculty Library, the Faculty of Political Science Library, and the Faculty of Economy Library. Through the consortium, the capacity of the Parliament Library to access information online will be significantly enhanced, for a relatively modest fee due to sharing the cost of the electronic resources through consortial purchases.

Another important development was that, as a part of the project of cooperation of the Parliament of Montenegro and the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, the Parliamentary Library became a member of the COBISS system in November 2008 and began contributing entries to the online catalog that is available to all COBISS members. It is very important for the Parliamentary Library to access recent information and to engage in interlibrary lending. The consortium opens new possibilities of cooperation with similar institutions.

Contacts with the parliamentary libraries of Austria, Slovakia, and Serbia were established through study visits. These institutions will provide significant assistance in the process of modernization of the Montenegrin Parliament Library through the consultants' recommendations. The study visits were planned to introduce the library staff to the positive experience and best practice at these similar institutions, regarding the role, organization, and daily activity of parliamentary libraries and research centers as important organizational units of any parliament. The operations of the parliamentary libraries in these countries indicated the recognition that was given to their services and revealed the necessity of reorganizing the Library and the Research Centre of the Parliament of Montenegro. The cooperation will touch on all aspects of parliamentary library activities, including those of research assistance, public relations, and ICT departments.

The Parliament of Montenegro is also a part of the European Center for Parliamentary Research and Documentation, an organization that fosters interparliamentary cooperation and exchange of information. The recent approval for a position of correspondent for the cooperation with this institution by the Parliament of Montenegro is something that deserves acknowledgment. However, nobody has been appointed yet.

Changes in, and plans for, the provision of services by the Library of the Parliament of Montenegro, as improved with support from the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, were recently presented to the Speaker of the Parliament, Deputy Speakers, Members of the Parliament, and staff of the Parliamentary Service, as well as to representatives of international organizations and the professional public in Podgorica. All attendees expressed their appreciation and their intent to make full use of the library in the future as well as their expectation that the library will undergo further development to become an important component of the Professional Service of the Parliament of Montenegro.

CONCLUSION

The current situation in the Parliament Library of Montenegro is improving. It is very important that it is being perceived as an effective part of the parent organization and that it has a valuable role to play. In the past the library and the professional service offered by its staff were viewed by the Parliament as being of minor importance. Some deputies, employees and a part of the managing staff of the Parliament did not acknowledge the value of information in today's world.

In connection with the recent changes in the Parliamentary Library, a survey of the deputies and employees, as potential users of the library, was conducted. They expressed their opinions, suggestions, needs, and requirements regarding the acquisition of new titles for the library. Based on the survey results, the collection development strategy was established. The selection and acquisition plan takes into account the findings of the survey and will contribute to updating the library's collections. The library plans to contact nongovernmental organizations and to require them to send their publications to the Parliamentary Library. This is only the beginning of the process of modernization.

The first list of new book accessions has recently been made available on the library's website, which will continue to feature new acquisitions, along with information on the reference services offered by the library and the seminars designed to introduce new deputies to the Parliament's services, including the library. But the most important step forward is starting participation in the shared online catalog. The contacts with colleagues from the other parliaments are very important for the exchange of the ideas on best practice. Contact with colleagues from the Serbian Parliament will be particularly valuable because of our common history and the similar challenges we face. A further very important step in the improvement of library work will be to formulate a budget plan at the start of every year. Such financial planning will help the collection development process. The diversification of traditional library services, an improved distribution of the publications to the deputies, and the

recruitment of parliamentary staff for the research service are also issues that must be urgently addressed for change to take place.

The modernization of the Parliamentary Library of Montenegro will be a gradual process, and it is hoped that it will have positive outcomes in the future.

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